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ABSTRACT

Moore's Creek Open Elementary school, located in a quiet African-American neighborhood in a sun-belt city, has operated as a progressive school of choice since 1973, despite the low survival rate of public alternative schools. This study identifies forces that have affected curriculum and instruction at Moore's Creek over the past quarter century. A combination of opportunities, initiatives, and attitudes has contributed to the school's survival and success. Certain city characteristics created favorable conditions for establishing and fostering this open school, including a strong economy, commitment to education and school reform, and importation of new ideas. Moore's Creek has built positive, mutually supportive relationships with the community and has had numerous parent and faculty advocates. However, curriculum and instruction has been pulled toward the conventional by district and state pressures (standardized tests, end-of-year testing, and direct instruction), staff-related pressures (lack of exposure to student-centered education, philosophical incompatibilities, faculty overload, and school size), and an increase in the number of students experiencing difficulty with self-directed learning. Faculty have initiated measures to mitigate these effects. (Contains 24 references.) (MLH)

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ED 422 615

Lessons from a Survivor:

25 Years of Open Education in a Public Alternative School

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It has been almost thirty years since the modern alternative schools movement began in America (Smith, Burke, and Barr, 1976). Under the varied banners of "alternative schools", "school choice", "magnet schools", and "charter schools", the movement to foster diversity among learning institutions has had the potential to galvanize education reform. Yet alternative schools have had a poor survival rate, and those that have survived have tended to drift toward the conventional over time. Non-conventional schools could be well-springs of innovation, infusing new ideas into the educational mainstream. Instead, scholars of the movement have concluded that these schools have not significantly transformed education, nor in many cases, even provided significant options for the students who have had the opportunity to attend them. (Chenoweth, 1994; Cuban, 1983; Duke, 1978).

Today, the promise of reform is raised anew with the rise of charter schools and magnet schools (O'Neil, 1996). It is by no means evident that this phase will be any more successful than any previous phase of the modern alternative schools movement. If the movement is ever to have a significant and lasting effect on education, it must look not only forward, but backward, to learn from the experiences of the small number of alternative schools that have not only survived, but prospered, over the decades.

Purpose of the Study

Moore's Creek Open Elementary School has operated as a progressive school of choice since it opened in 1973. The purpose of this study was to identify forces that have had an impact on curriculum and instruction at Moore's Creek over the past quarter century. I examined forces that tended to pull the program towards the conventional and away from the progressive foundations of the program, and forces that have accounted for the school's ability to resist these threats and continue to implement a progressive, student-centered program. In this paper, I will share information that may be of value in strengthening schools of choice in the face of continued and strong political pressures for standardization. In addition, lessons learned in this study may be of benefit to educators concerned with the longevity of innovative programs within conventional schools.

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M. A. Dunn

Method

As Duke (1995) observes, extensive histories of alternative schools are rarely undertaken because of their typically short lives. Yet it is precisely because of their poor survival rates that a better understanding of successful alternative schools is needed. One of the primary reasons I chose Moore's Creek Open School was its longevity. Moore's Creek has existed as an open optional school since it was founded a quarter of a century ago.

I conducted this inquiry as an historical study of curriculum and instruction using qualitative methods of data collection, analysis and interpretation (Davis, 1978; Duke, 1995; Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Patton, 1990). Historical inquiry requires that the researcher collect data across time, identifying key events in the life of the school. Davis (1978) recommends seven guidelines for historical curriculum inquiry, which I followed during this investigation:

1. Authority -- support with valid, traceable evidence.
2. Interpretation -- of the curriculum story.
3. Significance -- treatment of major turning points.
4. Context -- study is clearly embedded in context of the program's time and place.
5. Representiveness -- avoids over simplification, stereotypes, and romanticism.
6. Perspectives -- even-handed treatment of events and assessments with multiple perspectives provided.
7. Style -- the story should be artfully told in a manner that is stimulating and interesting.

Historical inquiry may be conducted using qualitative methods, but places particular emphasis on primary sources such as minutes, curriculum guides, and contemporaneous newspaper articles. Historical curriculum inquiry is impeded by the failure of most schools to retain documents over time. However, Moore's Creek has retained more than two thousand documents related to its history, including photographs, newspaper clippings, brochures, minutes, newsletters, audio and video-tapes, and one court order. I reviewed all of these documents and selected 155 for content analysis.

I used intensive sampling to identify teachers who had been successful in implementing an open program. Three teachers were selected based on the principal's recommendations and my own observations during my initial visit. Two of the teachers interviewed, Carl Roberts and Carrie Holden, had been at the school since it opened.

Patricia Hughes had been with the school since the late 1980's. I observed their classrooms for a minimum of three hours and interviewed them for thirty minutes to an hour. When analysis of the data revealed a need to talk to a beginning teacher, I interviewed a second year teacher. In addition to these teachers, I interviewed the current principal, Karen Stokes-Warner, former principal Elsie Bates, and a former teacher. I also talked to a former school board member to discuss the conclusion of a period of controversy involving optional schools and the school board.

Qualitative methods employed included triangulation through the use of multiple sources and multiple kinds of sources, intensive sampling, negative case analysis, use of a peer debriefer, member checking, and auditing (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). The identities of the school and the respondents were hidden to protect the participants and to encourage candor regarding sensitive issues.

A Review of the Literature on Successful Alternative Schools

Researchers who have examined successful alternative schools have identified characteristics and practices that these alternative schools have in common. Size, choice status, mission, and leadership roles are important elements of an alternative school's success.

- Careful Planning and Systematic Development -- Successful alternative schools are carefully planned, usually stemming from identified needs. Growth of alternative schools should systematic and cautious (Smith, Burke, and Barr, 1976).
- Funding -- Seed grants are not sufficient. Plans need to be in place to continue to provide adequate funding beyond the school's initial stages (Smith, Burke, and Barr, 1976).
- Small Size -- Alternative schools are typically smaller than conventional schools, frequently enrolling less than 200 students. Small size allows for a sense of community, commitment to common goals and philosophy, decreased bureaucracy and greater responsiveness to student needs (Foley, 1983, Raywid, 1994; Young, 1990).
- Choice -- Parents, children, and teachers are all involved with the school by choice. Teachers have a role in hiring other teachers (Raywid, 1994).
- Clear Mission -- The school's goals and mission are distinctive and clearly articulated. Rather than trying to be all things to all people, successful alternative schools are able to tailor their programs to their populations.

A mission that is understood and shared by all members of the school community allows staff members to work collaboratively and effectively on what they are able to do best (Blank, 1994; Foley, 1983; Young, 1990).

- Strong Leadership -- The principal or director is an effective leader who is able to motivate teachers and students. He or she is actively involved in promoting a curriculum that is grounded in the needs and backgrounds of the students. The school's superintendent sustains the autonomy and integrity of the school (Blank, 1994; Foley, 1983).
- Cooperative Relationships -- Planning, operation, and evaluation involve students, parents, faculty, community, and administration. Community resources are utilized (Paskal and Miller, 1975; Smith, Burke, and Barr, 1976).
- Continuity in leadership -- Raywid (1994) finds considerable continuity in leadership among successful alternative schools, citing as an example a former alternative principal who now oversees his district's alternative school program.
- Tight and Loose Coupling -- The relationship between central administration is balanced. Among schools that are successful, not simply in surviving, but in offering distinctive programs, alternative schools must follow certain district guidelines, but are allowed some autonomy. Schools may be permitted flexibility with regard to district rules, conventions and procedures (Blank, 1994; Young, 1990).

In general, successful alternative schools are focused, chosen by participants, supported by strong leaders, and enjoy some autonomy from district controls.

The Research Site

Moore's Creek is located a few blocks from the business district of a prosperous sunbelt city. Behind the school is the city's oldest cemetery. While the city's high-rises tower in the background, the school is immediately surrounded by a quiet, African-American neighborhood. Moore's Creek is situated at the end of a cul-de-sac on a shady street consisting mostly of one story houses and cottages. It is a pleasant street with well-tended gardens, but bars on many windows serve as reminders that this is an inner-city school.

Although the school is a quarter of a century old, the building is very new, having been completed in 1995. The new facility was erected between the gymnasium and entrance of the original building, built in 1935. The present building was specifically designed to accommodate Moore's Creek's philosophy of open education, which is discussed in the section on curriculum and instruction.

The school's entrance is on the second floor. The main corridors have a museum-like appearance, and with good reason. The new building was designed with the help of the executive director of the local science museum. The design makes use of the corridors to create a museum environment in which hands-on materials are always available for free and guided exploration. These learning centers, or "centers of exploration" include aquariums and terrariums for live animals, microscopes and fossils, physical models of human anatomy, a weather station, simple machines, musical instruments, a television studio, and a mini-city complete with functioning in-school post office, bank, and store.

To accommodate multi-graded, team-taught classes averaging 50 children, students are grouped in large classrooms. Most classrooms open onto the outside with additional space extending each classroom into the outdoors. Classrooms are connected in pairs by "forums", amphitheaters that provide privacy for break out groups and encourage interactions between classes. As was characteristic of the alternative schools of the sixties and seventies, use of space inside the classrooms is flexible, with no assigned seats or obvious front to the classrooms (Barth, 1972; Kohl, 1969; Silberman, 1973). There are no desks; students move to tables, sofas, and easy chairs to complete their activities.

History

Moore's Creek Open Elementary School opened in 1973 in an African American neighborhood in the center of a city I will call Annerton. The school board had granted a group of parents and educators permission to establish the school the previous spring. This group, People for Open Education, had spent the prior two years meeting together to read about and discuss open education. Some of them had run an independent open school the year before Moore's Creek opened. The group included the director of an open pre-school and several parents from her school and the principal of a public elementary school, Josie Combes, who would be Moore's Creeks first principal.

Moore's Creek was established two years after a federal judge ruled that the city must use to accelerate the desegregation of the public schools. While the court-ordered busing of children across town was still a divisive and often explosive issue, Moore's Creek was drawing children into the inner city from across town. This attracted the attention of prominent civil rights leaders, who enrolled their own children in the school. Enrollment of large numbers of black students, however, was initially problematic. Combes succeeded in achieving enrollment commensurate with the district ratio through active recruitment, even knocking on doors in the neighborhood looking for students.

All summer, black and white parents from all across the city worked together to build the school, both physically and philosophically. They painted hallways and lockers, scrounged for furniture, and met with teachers to plan a self-paced, open curriculum that would emphasize team-teaching and active learning experiences.

Like the students, the teachers were at the school by choice, applying to the school not only from across the school district, but from across the nation, as Combes had advertised both locally and nationally. A large pool of applicants allowed her to select teachers whose experiences and/or values were compatible with the open philosophy of education. Combes brought the teachers in in July, one month earlier than usual so that they could get to know one another and prepare to teach an open curriculum.

School opened in August of 1973, with 672 students, 28% of them black. Because transportation was not provided, parents in the southside incorporated to buy school buses and run their own bus service to the school. Parents provided their own transportation until the following year, when a federal judge ruled that the city must provide free transportation to optional schools, as they already did to assigned schools.

By this time, Moore's Creek was now one of five optional schools or programs. The year after Moore's Creek opened, another open elementary school, a traditional elementary school, an open middle school, and an open high school were established. The increase of optional schools did not occur without controversy. The mid-seventies saw the rise of tensions, both over demographic and philosophical concerns.

In 1975, it was apparent that given their present level of enrollment, none of the optional schools would comply with court mandated guidelines for racial balance. While it was feared that some white students would have to be removed from the schools by reverse lottery, an intense targeted public relations campaign brought all the schools into compliance, and they have remained within guidelines ever since.

But demographic pressures were followed by philosophical controversies that haunted the schools into the late 1970's. With four optional schools and one optional program now in operation, battles over resources and ideology threatened the growth and stability of the optional schools movement. Roberts described the early years as a period of controversy, a time that the school was always held under a microscope. In those years, he reports, they were never really sure if the school was going to be there the following year. In fact, some board members publicly expressed the same doubts, with one member stating, "I don't think there's any question that at some point in the future you're going to see the optional schools phased out" (Dunn, 1997, p. 83).

Negative attitudes towards the schools may have stemmed in part from competition between advocates of traditional and open education over resources during a budgetary crisis. At this time, there was one traditional elementary school compared to two open elementary schools, one open middle school, and an open component at West Annerton High School. Supporters of traditional education wanted more schools, while backers of both programs were pressing the board for extensions and improvements to existing schools.

But the pressures were not only financial, but also ideological. An editorial in the local paper reflected that the controversies were not new, but at least as old as Horace Mann and John Dewey. With limited resources available to meet everyone's needs, the city was involved in a debate over how children should be taught (Dunn, 1997, p. 84). Groups of open and traditional proponents were rumored to be recruiting school board candidates. The board declared "a moratorium" on decisions affecting the optional schools and appointed a committee of parents and principals to study the issues (Dunn, 1997, p. 84).

By 1976, with standardized test scores from the previous year indicating that all optional schools were returning scores generally above the systemwide average the validity of the schools became more widely accepted. The establishment of a second traditional elementary school also eased tension. While there were a few recurrences of tensions between the open and traditional schools up to the late seventies, by 1980 there were no further recurrences of controversies involving the optional schools.

The 1980's were a quiet decade for optional schools in general and Moore's Creek in particular. Internally, as will be seen below, there was some drift towards more traditional practices in the classrooms, but the essential components of the program, such as team-teaching, multi-age classrooms, and emphasis on experiential learning endured. Externally, relations between the open and traditional school supporters were no longer

adversarial. Although there was very little growth in the optional schools program in the 1980's, they were by then an accepted, if small, part of the school system.

By the late eighties it was the conventional, assigned schools that were under attack. Parents, especially those new to the area, criticized the quality of conventional schools, complaining of mediocre test scores, crowded conditions, and overworked teachers. The conditions, one parent complained, were driving them to look for alternatives:

> When we see neighbors moving into our communities coming from public school systems all over the nation placing their children in the Annerton system in good faith and then in a fairly short period of time desperately seeking alternatives -- be they private schools, optional schools, or even methods as drastic as seeking permanent transfers out of [town] -- these things indicate to us that the model is failing. (In Dunn, 1997, p. 91).

Parents were beginning to pressure the board to end cross-town busing and threatening to place their children in private schools if the quality of public education did not improve. The 1990's would bring about two changes that had a marked effect on the future of Moore's Creek: the introduction of magnet schools as a city-wide response to public criticism, and the construction of new facilities designed specifically for the open school.

By the late 1980's both the neighborhood surrounding Moore's Creek and the school building itself had begun to deteriorate. A housing project had been built near the school. Absentee landlords had allowed their property to run down. Prostitutes and drug dealers haunted the streets. The school continued to function as an open school, making the best of its limitations. The presence of dealers, prostitutes, and alcoholics on the streets did not deter the staff from taking advantage of near-by facilities. They continued to walk downtown for field trips to the museums and library. They notified the police when a walking field trip was planned, and headed downtown through the cemetery, which was safer than the streets.

But the building, as well as the neighborhood, was deteriorating. The school's facilities were fifty years old. In 1990, Moore's Creek was placed in a replacement schools funding category by the district. When funding was approved by voters the following year, a decision had to be made whether to restore or rebuild the school. Recognizing both the historical value of the school to the community *and* its inadequacy as a facility for an open elementary school, a committee of parents and teachers voted to do both, retaining, but remodeling the school's east and west wings and razing the central building.

The new school was designed to accommodate the school's open philosophy both practically and symbolically. The design of the school was inspired by the science museum less than a mile away. An explanation from a fund raising flier illustrates the close relationship between the building design and the school's beliefs about learning:

> The (museum) environment challenges -- even seduces -- kids to tap into their inborn desire to touch, see, and contemplate the unknown. It is not an overstatement to say that most kids are awestruck by the experience and that the environment has the power to change how young minds see the world around them. It is very likely that this observation is universally accepted, witnessed by the fact that virtually every urban area either has or is seeking to develop similar facilities. Assuming this power is real, the question must be asked: Why should kids be stimulated to act upon their innate curiosity only once a year during a field trip or through the random visit when accompanied by a parent? Can a school not be designed in a similar manner? (In Dunn, 1997, p. 94).

During the two years that the school was under construction, Moore's Creek was housed in a vacant elementary school a few miles away. The facilities were adapted to the Moore's Creek program. Learning centers were set up. Team-taught classes were placed in classrooms connected by bathrooms or in trailers set face to face.

By the time the new facility open in 1995, Moore's Creek was not one of five optional schools, but instead a part of a burgeoning magnet school system. In the eighties, the city tentatively began to explore the idea of magnets but no radical changes were made until the early nineties, when a James Milton, a superintendent experienced with magnet schools, was hired. When he arrived in 1991, options included the five schools opened in the seventies, two more traditional schools, an extended day program, and a few optional components available to students within their assigned schools. This year, there are a total of 40 magnets in the system.

Other changes Milton introduced included benchmark goals, raised standards, and an express willingness to fire principals and teachers to improve schools. Teachers' bonuses were tied to each schools' success in meeting benchmark goals, set annually by the superintendent's office. Typical goals pertained to quantitative data, such as achievement test scores and attendance.

Factors such as district attitudes and physical facilities have interacted with curriculum and instruction at Moore's Creek throughout its history, at time enabling and at times inhibiting, the school's ability to implement a curriculum consistent with an open philosophy of education.

Curriculum and Instruction at Moore' Creek

Philosophy

The label "open school" began to be used to describe certain alternative schools during the late sixties and early seventies, appearing in publications such as Barth's Open Education and the American School and Silberman's Open Classroom Reader. Open education is less a particular set of practices than a philosophy that promotes mutually respectful student/teacher relations and flexible, informal learning environments. Specifics about how open education is carried out are left to the practitioners, not the theorists (Barth, 1972; Kohl, 1969; Silberman, 1973).

Therefore, I did not bring external definitions of open education into this study, but rather looked at how the concept has been applied at Moore's Creek over the past 25 years. Moore's Creeks literature emphasizes that open education is an attitude more than a model. Certain characteristics of open education, however, do emerge from writings about the school. Open education is interpreted as student-centered, with an emphasis on respect for the individual and flexibility to meet individual needs. Students work independently at their own rate, and the classroom atmosphere is informal. Experiential learning is emphasized.

I was able to find no formal statement of philosophy prior to 1982. Statements published since then were consistent in emphases on developing a positive self-image, the child's active engagement in learning, use of concrete materials in a rich and varied environment, and interaction between classroom and community. While these values are not formally articulated in a philosophy statement prior to 1982, they do appear in literature, such as brochures, newspaper articles, and a self-study report, from the early 1970's on (Dunn, 1997).

Goals

As with the philosophy, I was unable to locate any formal statements of goals dating to the school's formative years, but could make inferences based on informal documents. For example, in 1980 a parent wrote in a letter to the editor:

> Our sons a kindergartner and a second grader are learning the basics -- reading, writing, math, science, etc. The method of teaching is different. The children have found that learning can be fun. Being challenged in a caring environment is key (In Dunn, 1997, p. 108).

While basic skills are emphasized, the school has always expressed at least as much concern with higher order cognitive and affective goals. Indeed, basic skills are viewed as means, not ends: "Basic skills are stressed, used as tools for learning rather than as an end in themselves. Academic subjects are woven around real life experiences and emphasize the interconnected nature of all learning and knowledge (In Dunn, 1997, p. 109).

However, basic skills are closely tied to state and district guidelines and growing emphasis on achievement test scores and end-of-year tests tied to the state curriculum has made coverage increasingly important to teachers. The influence of testing and accountability has been strong since the 1980's. Pressure intensified in the 1990's, with the introduction of benchmark goals, usually linked to end-of-year tests, and accountability, including bonuses tied to the benchmark goals. The relationship between district and state pressures and the operational curriculum is discussed under Pressures and Responses.

References to basic academic skills in written records tend to be vague and general, often referring to the state or district curriculum, for example: "Implements the [state] Basic Education Plan" (In Dunn, 1997, p. 109). In contrast, higher order and affective goals are more specific and do not refer to external sources, for example: "Improving comprehension through critical listening and oral discussions" (In Dunn, 1997, p. 109). Goals associated with higher order thinking reflect the student-centered philosophy of the school , for example: "We encourage creative expression, strive to help students exercise their freedom to question ... " (In Dunn, 1997, p. 110). The language of the goals is action-oriented, targeting learners as doers.

Like many alternative schools, Moore's Creek stresses affective, as well as cognitive goals. Their affective goals have two primary foci: building a positive self-concept and inspiring joy in learning. Developing responsibility is also emphasized.

Because very little data are available that describe the school's goals in its early years, it is difficult to trace consistency of goals over time. An emphasis on affective goals has been retained since the early years. Goals are articulated in the past decade seem to have remained constant over time and across the curriculum.

Curriculum

Moore's Creek must cover the same academic objectives as all city/county schools, but the curriculum's organization, breadth, and special features appear to be specific to Moore's Creek. Students are taught core

subjects in self-contained, multi-graded classrooms. Subjects such as art, music, and physical education are taught by special teachers. Additional enrichment programs include advanced Spanish, Odyssey of the Mind, and four clubs: chess, drama, writing, and art. An enrichment teacher is employed full time to work on a pull-out basis with highly motivated students. An academically gifted teacher pulls out children who are identified gifted. As they progress, the enrichment and gifted groups take on increasing responsibility and may eventually conduct independent study projects. Special teachers often work with classroom teachers to integrate their subjects into the regular curriculum.

Where possible, the curriculum is organized around themes. For example, a schoolwide production of Mozart's Magic Flute, put on with help from the state opera company, incorporated the arts, music, social studies, and drama. Each primary class does a unit on travel that incorporates all subject areas. While I saw evidence of integrated instruction in these intentional, theme-based and whole school units of study, I saw few examples of integration in subject-centered instruction. I did see a primary science lesson that emphasized both science and reading skills and also included some music, but math and language arts lessons that I observed did not make reference to other disciplines. The school has always reported that it allows students opportunities to plan their own learning. In practice, I saw this only in one classroom and the enrichment groups.

Instructional Activities

Although many features of the Moore's Creek curriculum are distinctive, the school particularly credits its instructional program with distinguishing it from more conventional schools. An emphasis on active, experiential learning has been central to the school since it began. As a brochure published in the school's second year reports:

> It is a school where the materials for learning are things -- all things readable, countable, measurable, manipulative things, things collected from all sources and displayed as magnets for children to use. Textbooks, workbooks, tests, programmed materials are all used in open education. *BUT* the curriculum structure is based on what children are *doing* for skill, knowledge, and wisdom (in Dunn, 1997, p. 124)

It is not possible to accurately compare classrooms today to classrooms a quarter of a century ago, since I only have recollections and photographs on which to base conclusions about the school in its early years. I have been able to observe in contemporary classrooms as well as view them on videotape, which has provided me with a

much deeper grasp of activities. In practice, I have seen a combination of student-centered and active instruction, teacher-direct instruction, and text-centered instruction (See Table 1). Typically, some children work in small groups with teachers, aides, and volunteers, while others work alone, in pairs, and in cooperative groups. In adult led groups, students may make books, receive instruction in content and processes, review assignments, explore new concepts, and discuss plans for projects. Working independently or with peers, children may plan projects, read books, complete text book or worksheet activities, play games, use computers, draw, write, and manipulate materials such as unifix cubes and tangrams.

Such simple manipulative materials are available in each classroom, while more complex materials, such as the weather station, are available in the learning centers. Learning centers have been a part of the school since it opened. Teachers use the learning centers most often by sending small groups out, often with parent volunteers. A primary teacher relates that older children may be asked to sketch what they see or label parts while kindergartners touch, feel, and play. A certified teacher in charge of the center designs lessons to use in the center.

Field trips may be among the most valued and enthusiastically recounted experiences at the school. "Some of the best experiences I have had," one teacher recalls, "Have been when we were away from the traditional settings." Field trips are a frequent occurrence at Moore's Creek. A school calendar for February of 1988 records nine scheduled field trips: two to the children's theater, three to the science museum, one to the nature museum, one to an historic farm, and one to the local branch of the state university. Field trips extend outside the city, sometimes even out of state. Classes have traveled several hours to attend Presidental Inaugurations on several occasions. Every year, intermediate classes attend an overnight at a camp for environmental education and team building activities.

The importance of manipulatives and active learning is communicated in the literature on Moore's Creek and was also stressed by most faculty in interviews. In observations, I saw frequent examples of active, hands-on learning and student-centered instruction, but I also saw frequent examples of text-centered and teacher-directed learning. Like some of the more innovative teachers in Larry Cuban's (1993) study of instructional practices, the teachers at Moore's Creek seem to have created a hybrid of student-centered and teacher-text-centered instruction

Table 1

Instructional Activities

Examples From Field Notes and Videotape	
Teacher-Directed	• "What you are going to do now is you are going to draw a picture of what you heard in the story." • In a human anatomy class, a teacher directs children as they label a diagram on a worksheet. • A teacher stands in front of a group explaining absolute and relative location.
Student-Centered	• A boy tells his teacher he wants to read to her from the "scary folder" he has compiled, so the two sit down and read together. • A teacher conducts a lesson on exports and imports by having children identify where the clothes they are wearing came from and speculating on how they got here. • The teacher randomly calls on children to stand up and tell the class about something that is of interest to them. A child reports that he saw Twister recently, and the class begins to speculate on whether a twister and a tornado are the same or different. The teacher sends him to the media center to research tornadoes and report back to the class.
Text-Centered	• "You should have some good notes on your desks and everyone should know how the earth rotates. Now I would like everyone at the table to close their books." • "Fourth graders will work in language books on direct quotations." • Directions on the black board: "Math -- chose two problems from each chapter, make sure you show your work."
Activity-Oriented	• Directions on a bulletin board: Be a shutter bug. Take pictures of your topic. Make a picture book using your photographs. Write a story about your pictures. Read your story to the class, your friends, a group of little ones. • Four children sit at a table making patterns with tangrams. Another child walks up and joins them. • Two girls pretend to be oceanographers and are interviewed by a third girl in a "talk show" performed for the whole class.

Classroom Organization

Each classroom has its own unique nature, however some characteristics are held in common. All classrooms are multi-graded and team-taught. Each classroom has two full-time teachers and one aide. Parent volunteers also assist in classrooms. Since the construction of the new building, all classes have been either primary (K-2) or intermediate (3-5). Previously, class groupings were less regular, based on class-size and available space. The new space has allowed for more consistency in groupings.

While classes have always been organized into multi-grade teams, the extent to which multi-age, team taught instruction has actually been practiced has fluctuated. Written descriptions and respondents' accounts of classes taught in the 1970's indicate that they functioned as intended, with team planning and teaching, flexible groupings, and cross-age instruction for some subjects. I have heard some small groups referred to by grade level. I do not know if this occurred in the 1970's.

The principal reports that the situation was quite different in the 1980's and early 1990's, when in spite of the multi-grade structure of the classrooms, many teachers were instructing in single grade units.

> I saw people when I came here in 1990 who had ... third, fourth, and fifth grade. But in one half of the room the kids faced one end of the room and the other faced the other ... it was an old building that had walls down the middle so it really had the chalkboards at each end already and they already had taken the furniture to sort of separate the two rooms and actually did nothing together (In Dunn, 1997, p. 112).

She attributes the more traditional structure that developed in the 1980's to the accountability movement and the influence of Madeline Hunter, whose effective teaching movement focused on direct instruction with guided and independent practice (Slavin, 1989).

Today, no such formal structuring of classes is apparent. Within classrooms, instruction occurs in whole groups, small groups, and one-on-one. At any given time in a classroom, some students may be working with adults while others may be working independently, alone or cooperatively. Children in all classes have contracts, which they follow to complete their week's assignments. Contract work is self-paced. Some children need all week to complete their contracts, others finish early and use the remaining time on free choice activities such as reading, pursuing independent studies, using computers, visiting learning centers, or engaging in the manipulative games in the classroom.

Opportunities and Constraints

There is a dynamic relationship between the Moore's Creek program and external and internal influences, with curriculum and instruction being pulled between open and conventional practices by competing influences. I did not find any aspects of the program that were always implemented in ways that were inconsistent with the school's stated values. Instead, I found that there were some aspects of the program that are at times congruent with open education and at times incongruent (See Figure 1, Congruencies and Incongruencies).

Almost all of the factors that were highly and consistently congruent with the school's articulated values were frame factors, that is to say, "factors [that] frame the curriculum, acting as both resources for and constraints on the process of curriculum implementation" (Posner, 1992, p. 186). These include philosophy and goals, facilities, classroom organization, and learning centers. Policies regarding the most congruent features of the program are generally set at the building level, e.g., multi-graded classrooms are an organizational feature of the school.

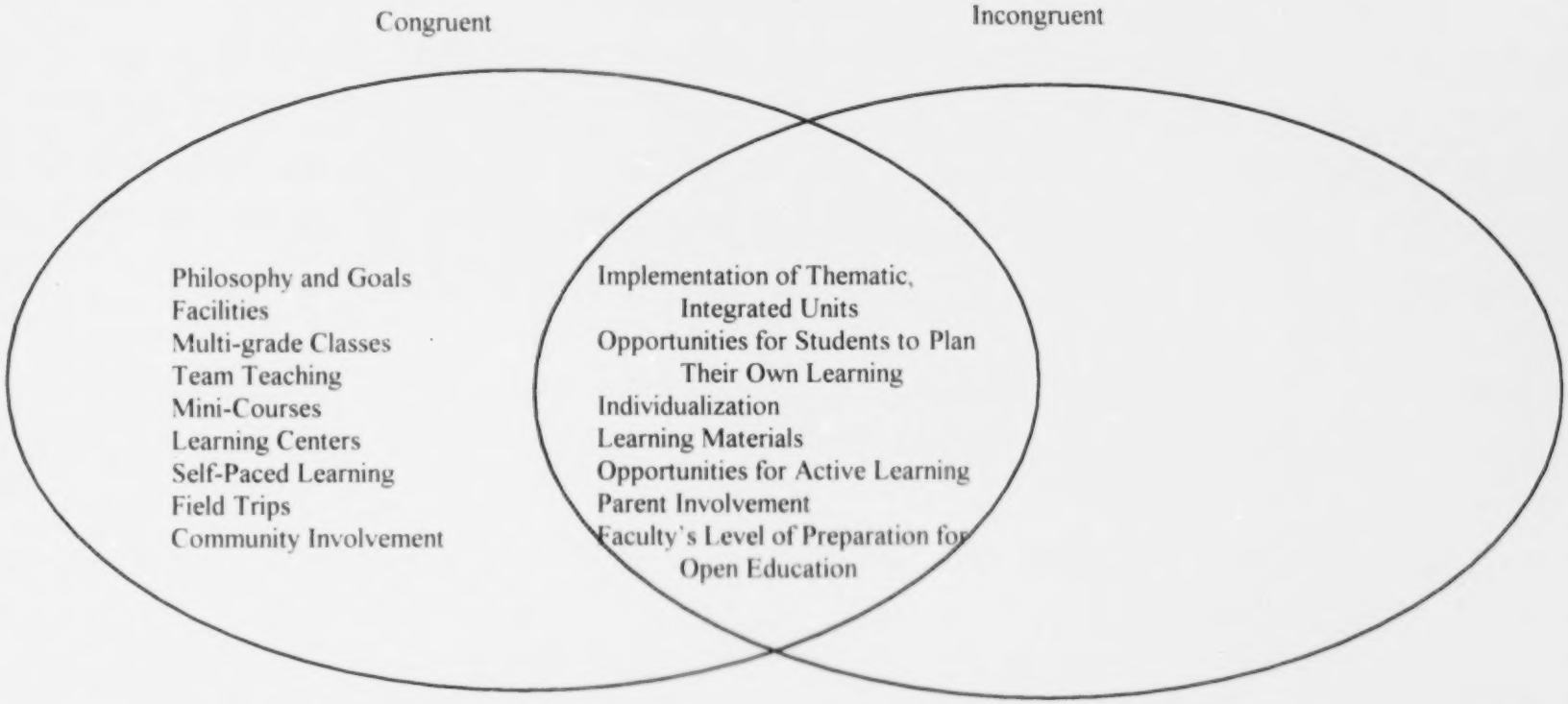
In contrast, aspects that are implemented within the classroom were less consistently implemented, with wide variations in the extents to which teachers implemented open education through such practices as individualizing instruction and using concrete manipulatives. These are curricular and instructional issues. Curricular and instructional decisions are influenced by building policies, but ultimately must be implemented by teachers and variations in implementation are to be expected (Thorton, 1991).

The educational program at Moore's Creek has been shaped by the contradictory influences that have competed to enable the program to develop as intended and to restrict the full realization of the program's core values. The implementation of a successful program that has to some extent remained congruent with the school's core values has been supported by opportunities, initiatives, and outlooks that the school community has been able to take advantage of since its inception. These include:

Adequate Background and Preparation

Many accounts of new alternative schools describe programs hastily begun and poorly planned, often without consensus on the core values of the programs (Barth, 1972; Duke, 1978b; Metz, 1986). By contrast, Moore's Creek's founders took the time to understand the philosophy of open education, build a sense of

Figure 1: Congruencies and Inconguencies



unity and shared vision, and plan the program. With such solid foundations, the Moore's Creek program was well on its way before it had even opened.

Location

Annerton is a growing city with a strong economy. It has the means to support innovative schools both financially and through its ample community resources. The city has a large professional class and a strong Chamber of Commerce. Commitment to education is very high and citizens are willing to advocate for school reforms and improvements. Private schools compete with public schools for students, exerting continuous pressure on the public schools to provide options for families within the system. The prosperity of the city has produced both demands for school reforms and the ability to finance them.

Not only has Moore's Creek's location in the greater Annerton area been important to its establishment, survival, and success, but so has its more specific location in a black community in uptown Annerton. The centrality of the school's location and its proximity to uptown facilities has always been a strength of the program, but this value has increased with the growth of the uptown area. As a school of choice, centrality of location is an asset, as it minimizes the burden students must bear in terms of time spent traveling to and from school. The school has always been convenient to parents who work uptown; today, with a high concentration of employees working in the uptown area, this is especially beneficial. Not only does the location of the school make it easier for parents to drop off and pick-up students and volunteer in classrooms, it also makes it easier for the school to recruit non-related volunteers from the business community. Because the school is in walking distance of the uptown area staff are able to take advantage of such facilities as the public library, a hands-on science museum, an art center, numerous art galleries, and a performance center.

Size

With more than 700 students, Moore's Creek is unusually large for an alternative school. Its size is inconsistent with most assumptions about successful alternative schools (Foley, 1983; Raywid, 1994; Young, 1990). While the large size of the school may have diluted the program, as will be discussed below, it may also have worked to the school's advantage. Unlike smaller alternative schools that may be lost in the system, Moore's

Creek is big enough to be taken seriously. In addition, small alternative schools often cost more per student to operate, perhaps compounding their need to justify their existence. By contrast, day to day operation of Moore's Creek costs the school system no more than any other school. The financial commitment the school has required, funding for the new building, probably would have been much smaller, if it had been given at all, had Moore's Creek, like most alternative schools, served fewer than 200 students. As long as larger schools are the standard for public schools, there may be some political advantages to the school's size.

Positive Community Relations

Community support has helped generate and sustain the program. Advocates in the community argued for the school before the school board when it was under consideration in 1972 and protested a recommendation to move the school in 1980. Pre-schools with similar programs recommend Moore's Creek to their families, providing the school with an influx of new students whose early childhood experiences have prepared them for open-education. The role the community plays in the school program contributes to its depth and diversity. From volunteer tutors to experts in content areas, members of the community provide abundant opportunities to support and enrich the student's learning experiences.

The support of the community has been cultivated by the school. Since Josie Combes first walked door to door in the immediate neighborhood recruiting students, the school has made itself known to the neighbors, reaching out to them whether or not they had children enrolled there. Moore's Creek has not only been sensitive to the needs and resources of their current neighbors, they have paid attention to former residents, bringing graduates of the original Moore's Creek High School into the conversation on the building renewal and inviting them for a final tour of the old building. Moore's Creek's sensitivity to the needs of the community has been reciprocated by financial and political support at turning points in the school's history.

Parental Involvement and Advocacy

Parents have always played a critical role in the survival and success of the school. Some of the founding parents were relative newcomers to the area, bringing fresh ideas from other systems, while others were longtime residents who knew how to work the system to advocate for the school. Among the early families were politically

powerful figures including civil rights leaders, school board members, and journalists. Besides bringing their political influence to the schools, parents from all socio-economic strata have contributed through such activities as assisting with renovations, volunteering regularly in both primary and intermediate classrooms, serving on committees, and fund-raising. Parent input has been critical in such major decisions as planning the new building.

Experienced Faculty and Support of New Teachers

Faculty members at Moore's Creek are there by choice; they are not assigned to the school by the district. Current teachers have opportunities to be involved in the hiring and training of new teachers. When hiring, most principals have tried to screen for teachers whose backgrounds and philosophies of education would support an open program. New teachers are acclimated into the school through a training program that accounts for both the philosophical and the practical issues of open education. Teachers are not expected to learn everything at once, and support is on-going through new teacher coffees, mentoring relationships, a three-year plan for learning about and implementing open education, and informal support provided by veteran teachers.

I consider the long term employment of many of the faculty, both in the building and in the district, to have been one of the most important positive influences on the school. Former teachers and principals have gone on to become principals, supervisors, and superintendents in the district, providing Moore's Creek with a strong network of supporters at the district level.

Moore's Creek employs three teachers who have been with Moore's Creek or Watson Open Schools since they started and the principal was also among the first teachers. The original faculty members bring years of experience with open education in general and Moore's Creek in particular. They are able to pass on the traditions of the school as well as serve as models for newer teachers. Having weathered many storms in the past, they may be less willing to give into external pressures. "What I have found over the years is that education is cyclical," Holden told me. "Things just go in a circle. They come in and they work for a while and they go out and they come back. To me it seems like it's impacted by what's going on in society at that time. We've just found that we need to fight for what we believe ..."

Experienced faculty members, whether long time Moore's Creek staff or not, may display the same persistence in defending their values. One senior teacher put it quite bluntly; with tenure and decades of teaching

experience she feels confident that she can implement a program that is consistent with her beliefs about learning, in spite of external pressures.

Administrative Commitment to Open Education

Principals who promoted and defended the philosophical basis of the school have been leaders who were willing to advocate for open education within and outside the building. They understood and were committed to the principles of open education. Four of Moore's Creek's five principals had had prior exposure to open education and two of them had taught at Moore's Creek. The one principal who had not had previous experience with open schools had been assistant principal at an alternative school for handicapped students, thus she was able to bring some experience with alternative schools, although not "Type One" or innovative alternative schools (Raywid, 1990). However, this principal did express less commitment to open education than the others, arguing, "I'm looking at teaching children and not philosophy," and recruiting more traditional teachers as a response to changes in the student body.

Teaching children, is, of course, the school's primary concern, but in some ways most of Moore's Creek principals *have* "taught philosophy." Commitment to the school's philosophy was apparent in conversations with and documents related to other principals. Stokes-Warner recalls that one of her most important roles when she came into the school was to articulate the school's philosophy in order to help teachers understand and implement the program's goals. Coming in after a decade in which some of the school's original purposes had been buried by such movements as back to the basics, accountability, and direct-instruction, it was important for her to help the school re-focus on its core values.

Public Information

Moore's Creek has not simply depended on the media to publicize their program; they have been proactive in informing the community about the school. In the early years, this was particularly true of efforts to reach the black community. Since minority, low income parents may not have as much access to information about optional schools as white, upper class parents, public information is particularly important in insuring racial and socio-economic balance. In more recent years, publicity efforts have been stepped up by the magnet schools program. At

the district level, magnet schools are publicized through videos, brochures -- including newspaper inserts -- fairs, and tours. Moore's Creek also holds coffees, during which parents are invited to learn about the school and meet secondary school students who have come up through the open school program. Parents who have a clear understanding of the school's philosophy and program are able to make judgments about whether it is the best environment for their children.

Continuity Through Middle and High School

Moore's Creek is part of a contiguous system of open schools and programs. Parents know that their students can expect consistent schooling throughout the school years. Recently, the school has begun to bring seniors from the open program at West Annerton to recruitment coffees so that perspective parents can see what the "end product" will look like. This tactic was particularly helpful in the early nineties, when Moore's Creek's test scores were poor compared to scores in the optional traditional schools.

Magnet Schools

Moore's Creek began idealistically and enthusiastically in the 1970's with a firm commitment to open education, but some respondents believe it lost touch with its values and has become a more conventional school since the 1980's. The magnet schools seem to be helping to revitalize the school and keep it focused on its distinctive qualities. As one teacher put it, "We had to be even more way out to be different" (Dunn, 1997, p. 166).

Magnet schools also brought more attention and validity to the existing optional programs in Annerton. Moore's Creek is no longer on the fringes, but instead belongs to a growing system of schools of choice that enjoys widespread popularity in the community. Individual schools benefit from the halo effect of the new system. One parent admitted to the principal of another magnet, that she didn't care where her child went, explaining, "Oh, I'm just interested in getting into any of those schools (Dunn, 1997, p. 167)."

Sense of History

The school has a strong sense of history. Retention of the east and west wings of the old building is one example. Another is plans, not yet fully implemented, to preserve the history of the school in the new building. Students made memory quilts, which are hung in the entry way. Archives were collected and stored. A consultant

was hired to write a history of the school. The school's sense of history is more symbolic than detailed. Respondents recounted images, such as parents painting lockers, but were vague or even inaccurate about key events in the school's history. One respondent, who was employed at the school at the time of the black enrollment crisis, could not recall the crisis, even when cued.

I can only speculate on what the value of the school's history is to the respondents and what its impact is on the program. The school's sense of history seems to contribute to a sense of continuity with the early years. Details may be less important than symbolic images that represent core values such as diversity, community, and a sense of shared ownership between faculty, students, and parents. Retaining symbolic images from the school's history helps the school community preserve and hand-on these values. School spirit at most schools focus on colors and mascots. Moore's Creek has these conventional symbols, but also focuses on deeper symbols that represent the spirit of the school as it has been handed down since it opened.

Pragmatic Persistence

The role of persistence was discussed in the section on staff, as some of the veteran teachers have been particularly persistent about defending their beliefs and implementing programs that are consistent with open education. But a persistent attitude has not only helped preserve the program in the face of district pressures, which may effect veteran teachers less than inexperienced teachers, but also in the face of environmental changes that are less emotionally threatening. Conducting team-taught classes through connecting bathrooms and taking walking field trips through a cemetery to avoid drug dealers and prostitutes exemplifies a kind of pragmatic persistence that has enabled the faculty to preserve some of the essential features of the program in spite of environmental obstacles.

A Proven Record

Success breeds success. In the seventies and early eighties in particular, standardized test scores tended to be higher than the district average. With changes in the student body, the school saw some decline in test scores, but it has maintained a reputation for academic excellence. After almost 25 years, the school has generated quite a

lot of alumni, and many of them have gone on to be very successful in secondary schools and beyond. One respondent boasts:

> ... turn on the television, see their names as credits of different shows coming out of California. We see them as anchors of news shows across the nation, some of them pop up as meteorologists. We've seen them send things up into space ... and whenever that happens, we kinda throw that out to let people know this is the type of talent that has come out of the school ... (In Dunn, 1997, p. 169.)

As a former principal put it, "If it's working, people will come (In Dunn, 1997, p. 169)."

Summary

A combination of opportunities, initiatives, and attitudes has contributed to the survival and success of Moore's Creek. Certain characteristics of the city created conditions favorable to the establishment of an open school, including a strong economy, commitment to education and school reform, and the importation of new ideas. The same characteristics that generated the school have continued to foster it.

The school has taken advantage of available opportunities and shown the initiative to shape and create opportunities, for example building positive, mutually supportive relationships with the community. The outlooks and attitudes of parents and faculty members, such as their sense of history and their willingness to advocate for the school, have helped them gain support for the program and hold on to things of value. The school has been able to preserve many of its distinctive qualities and it has survived to implement a program that is consistent with the philosophy of open education, but by most accounts it has been pulled towards the conventional by external and internal pressures.

Pressures and Responses

Respondents identify three primary sources of pressure that have affected curriculum and instruction: district and state pressures, staff related pressures, and changes in the student body. Of the four experienced faculty members, all felt that curriculum and instruction had in some ways become constrained by pressures from at least one of these sources.

District and State Pressures

Evidence from interviews and newspapers indicates that much of the pressure imposed by the district and state is in turn coming from the community. The Chamber of Commerce, for example, is a strong group that takes seriously the relationship between public schools and the economy. They have publicly expressed dissatisfaction with the schools and have pressured the district and the school board for improvements. The pressures exerted by citizens' groups are not inherently unhealthy. They may provide the impetus for raising expectations and establishing innovative programs. But when the pressures lead to district and state responses that are in one veteran teachers words "stifling" they can move already innovative programs backwards, rather than forwards. This effect has been felt at Moore's Creek, as it has been felt in alternative schools nationwide (Chenoweth, 1998; Foley, 1984; Nathan, 1985; Young, 1990).

Respondents mention over-emphasis on standardized test scores as one source of pressure and question their validity as the only measure of success. The school has a high percentage of low s.e.s. students who may not perform well on standardized tests. One teacher remarked that what is a poor score for one child may be an excellent score for another, if it represents a significant gain for that child. In addition, standardized test scores should not be the only tool for evaluating the effectiveness of a program that places as much emphasis on affective and higher order cognitive skills as basic skills.

Nevertheless, compared to concerns about other external pressures, respondents did not express as much discomfort with standardized testing. The school has generally done as well as or better than the district average on standardized tests, although there was a slump in the early 1990's. With standardized test scores tending to validate the program, they may be less threatening than other pressures. In addition, standardized achievement tests are general enough not to dictate the curriculum to the extent that end-of-year testing has.

The direct instruction movement was named by two respondents as having had a negative influence on instruction. It was felt that the criteria for seven part lessons dictated instructional methods in a way that was often incompatible with the open education philosophy. Direct instruction is by definition teacher-directed, while the school is intentionally student-centered.

End-of-year testing is consistently identified by respondents within the school as having the most serious impact on curriculum and instruction. End-of year testing has affected the sequencing of the curriculum from third grade up, creating dissonance between the multi-age structure of the classrooms and the sequence of learnings necessitated by the tests. It has also interfered with teacher's flexibility to deviate from the standard curriculum, a technique inherent in the "openness" of open education. Holden reported:

> The biggest pressure is probably the state system ... of meeting these end-of-year goals. Now, ... I have appreciated having the goals and knowing specifically what the students were expected to learn, but it is easy, especially if you are younger and inexperienced ... for these goals to become the end-all and be-all, the most important thing (In Dunn, 1997, p. 173).

Hughes also remarked on the influence end-of-year tests have on new teachers, who have not internalized learning objectives. These teachers tend to look outside themselves when setting objectives, and therefore state guidelines tend to carry more weight with them. More experienced teachers internalize objectives and feel more in control of learnings.

Teachers who have preserved the integrity of their classrooms while accommodating district and state pressures have demonstrated the same pragmatic persistence that has helped them cope with environmental obstacles. They have been pragmatic in recognizing that they must adapt to the pressures by taking a realistic look at expectations and adapting their classrooms to meet them. They have been persistent in allowing their own beliefs about learning to guide them, as well as external directives. Stokes-Warner relates:

> I think as the set curriculums have moved in, trying to encourage integrated learning and interdisciplinary teaching has been harder but still at the same time the teachers here have a dedication to children, how children learn best and have somewhat been mavericks in that they have not given in to just, to just teaching isolated subjects, ... they're taught in teams trying to integrate subjects...

Holden and Stokes-Warner both believe that the first response to external influences on the curriculum should be to understand expectations. Quoting advice from Josie Combes, Holden argues, "If you know the expectations of the school, of the district, and of the state, know them like you know your own name, address, and telephone number, you can do just about anything in your classroom." She finds that having internalized learning objectives has allowed her much more flexibility in planning her program, because she is able to see the relationship between her activities and district or state objectives. "I know I've heard some of the young teachers say, 'You can always find a golden objective for what you do.' And we say, 'You know *everything is* learning, but it's knowing the curriculum that well.'"

Stokes-Warner also emphasizes the need to understand and meet expectations. "One thing I was told ... is that you have to meet our standards and then you can do whatever you want to do beyond that." Like Combes, Stokes-Warner has tried to help teachers recognize that if the school can meet these standards, they still have freedom in their classrooms. She has also tried to look at state standards, which are the requirements for which the school is ultimately accountable. End-of-year tests, she points out, are designed by the state, not the city-county. "... for me, it was always keeping a hand on what the measures were, very clearly knowing what the measures were going to be and not panicking because there is a whole blue book ... five inches thick, that lists standards that have to be taught." For Hughes, Holden, and Stokes-Warner, preserving the integrity of the curriculum is largely a matter of keeping standards in perspective. They must be met; they do not have to become the whole program.

. Staff-Related Pressures

Respondents identify three forces that contribute to staff related pressures: lack of exposure to student-centered education, philosophical incompatibility with the program, and feelings of being overwhelmed by the program's demands. I would identify a fourth source of pressure, closely tied the others: the size of the school. It would be difficult at any time to assemble a staff of approximately 70 teachers and aides who share a common vision of open education. The school's large staffing needs has the potential to dilute the concentration of teachers who are well suited to the environment. In addition, it can be difficult to individualize instruction with a large student ratio.

The school has responded to staffing problems with careful hiring and training practices. Some of the procedures are new as this year, so it is too early to tell how effective they will prove in terms of reducing turn-over and increasing philosophical agreement between teachers and the program. The hiring process begins with the district, where applicants who appear particularly suitable are recommended to Moore's Creek. At Moore's Creek, they are interviewed by the principal and a group of teachers. The principal tries to identify teachers who express attitudes that are likely to be compatible with the program and with the student's needs.

Initial training for new teachers is both idealistic and practical. Teachers are introduced to the guiding principles of open education, but they are also given guidance in dealing with the management issues that will arise in multi-graded, team-taught classes. The on-going growth and support of new teachers is provided for

through the support of veteran teachers and through the gradual introduction of some of the core principals on which the program rests.

Changes in the Student Body

Respondents report changes in the student body that derive from several sources: societal changes, parents choosing the school for reasons other than ideology, competition from other magnet programs, and children coming to Moore's Creek as a result of adjustment problems in other settings. These changes may have resulted in an increase in students who have difficulty with self-directed learning, in turn leading some teachers to implement a more teacher-directed program.

Responses to a changing student body have occurred both within the classroom and at the building level. Once again, a spirit of pragmatism seems to have prevailed as the staff has adjusted to accommodate the needs and demands of the students. Within the classroom, contracts and self-paced learning help teachers differentiate between more and less self-motivated students. Those who are self-directed are able to work more on their own, while the teachers spend additional time monitoring the progress of the less self-directed students. Holden and her team teacher use independent study to challenge the more motivated students. The schoolwide enrichment program also provides an opportunity to challenge students who are capable of self-directed learning.

But while accommodation is a pragmatic response to changes in the student body, improved public information can reduce some of the variation among students by helping parents choose a program that is a good match for their children. Twenty-five years ago, parents who chose to place their children at Moore's Creek understood what open education was about. The concept had received considerable attention in the press. In addition, many of the parents who enrolled their children were among the founding families.

Today, with a quarter of a century having passed since the open school opened, the concept is not so familiar. Stokes-Warner finds that many of the parents who chose Moore's Creek do so without having a clear understanding about what the school is about. She takes time at recruitment fairs and coffees to make sure the parents do have the information they need to make the best choices for their children. This means not only articulating the school's philosophy to perspective parents, but also making them aware of other options within the system.

Summary

The most critical pressures on the program have stemmed from three main sources: district and state influences, staffing, and changes in the student body. Respondents report that these pressures have had the effect of pushing the curriculum and instruction of the school towards more traditional programming, but proactive responses have helped to temper these effects. The faculty has been able to use existing elements of the program, such as learning contracts, to adjust to the pressures while minimizing their impact. They have also initiated programs, such as new teacher coffees, in response to pressures. The sources of pressure on the school are largely outside their control, but their initiatives have increased school level influence over the forces that shape the program.

Discussion

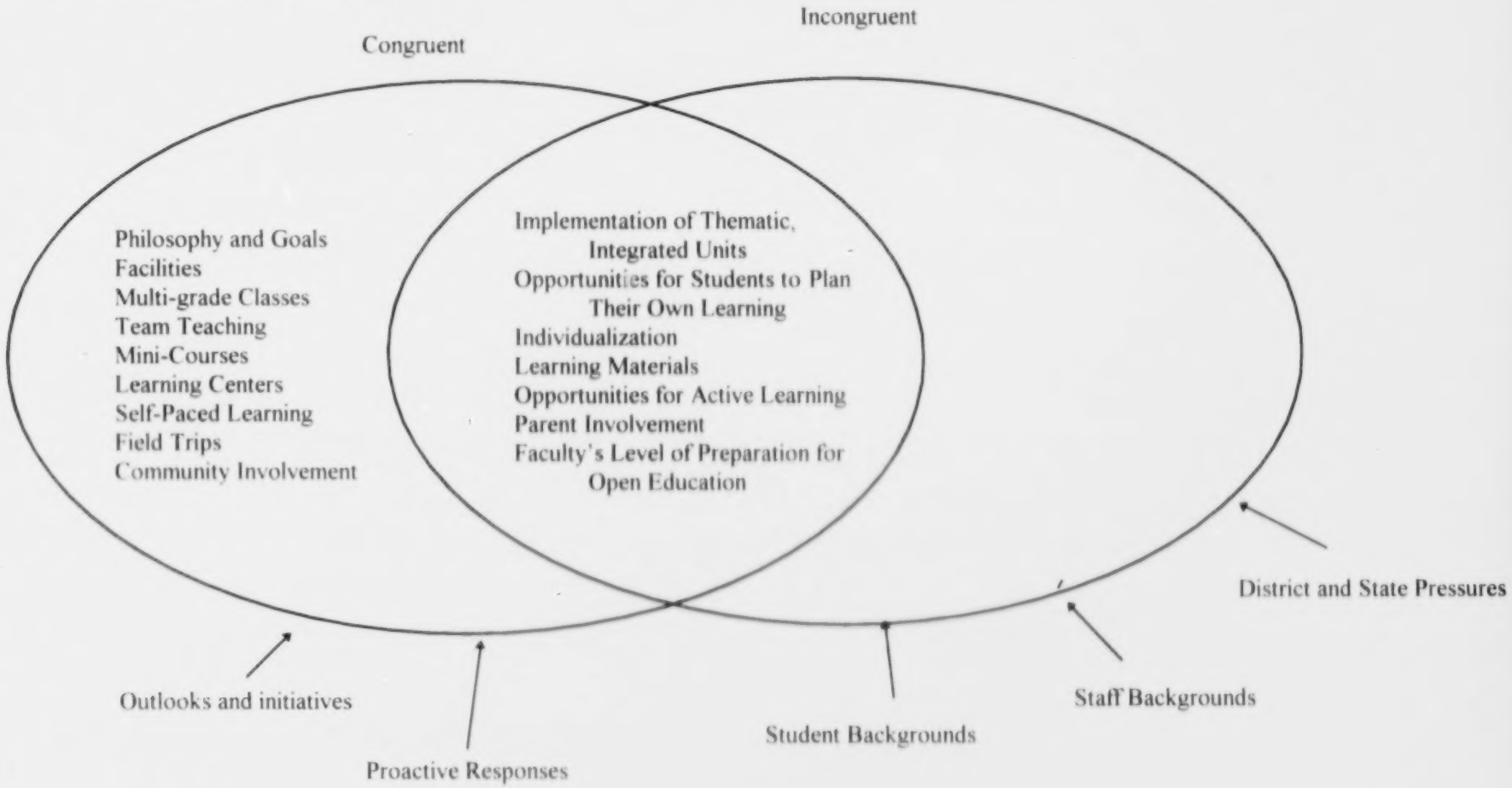
As Figure 1 demonstrates, curriculum and instruction at Moore's Creek are neither entirely congruent, nor entirely inconcongruent with the core concepts of open education, as stated in the school's philosophy and goals. An amended version of the Venn Diagram (Figure 2, Frame Factors) helps explain why curriculum and instruction fall in the middle.

Frame factors set and controlled at the building level shape and pull the curriculum towards the values of open education. Features of open education that are part of the over all structure of the school, such as multi-age classes and school facilities, have remained congruent, and in turn influence curriculum and instruction. Frame factors largely outside of the school's control, such as demographics and district pressures, may pull curriculum and instruction towards more conventional programming.

Beyond structural characteristics of the open school, there are additional frame factors that help support the program congruence. Opportunities, such as the school's location, maximize the potential for putting the philosophy of open education into practice. Outlooks and initiatives on the part of the school community not only allow them to make the best use of available opportunities, but also to create new opportunities. Finally, proactive responses to external pressures have helped faculty and parents retain control over curriculum and instruction.

My study of Moore's Creek has confirmed most of the assumptions about successful of alternative schools stated in the literature, altered one, and raised several new areas for further research. Careful planning and

Figure 1 Congruency and Incongruency



systematic development, choice, clarity of mission, strong leadership, continuity in leadership, and cooperative community relationships inside and outside the building have all sustained the school (Blank, 1994; Foley, 1983; Raywid, 1994; Young, 1990). District relations have had both positive and negative influences. Loose coupling in the early years and advocacy for the school among district personnel have supported the program, but district and state pressures have at times pulled the curriculum towards more conventional practices. Both the positive and negative effects of district relations support earlier findings that school districts need to provide strong support for alternative programs (Smith, Burke, and Barr, 1976), but allow some autonomy regarding rules, conventions, and procedures. (Blank, 1994; Young, 1990).

Small size has been identified in the literature as a criterion for success, but Moore's Creek is a large school. I find that the experiences of Moore's Creek both corroborate and challenge assumptions about size. The size of the school increases its validity and its access to resources. Large class sizes, however, may limit opportunities to develop such "open" practices as individualized instruction. The necessity for a large staff makes it difficult to assemble a faculty committed to open education.

In addition to the characteristics commonly identified in the literature, several other characteristics have contributed to the success of the program. Characteristics of the greater Annerton community have supported the establishment, growth, and stability of the school. These include a strong economy, importation of new ideas, and the availability of community and university resources. The school's centrality has made it accessible to students from across the city and county and to family and community members in the uptown area. It has also encouraged the frequent use of community resources uptown. The fact that the school is located in the inner city has brought in minority families that might otherwise attend more conventional schools.

While the importance of parent support has been mentioned in prior studies, the political power of many Moore's Creek parents has been of particular value to the school, especially in its formative years. In addition, the presence of civil rights leaders among the school's first families can be expected to have legitimized the school in the eyes of black families.

The importance of a strong staff with a shared vision is also known. How this can be facilitated has been illuminated by this study. One of the strengths of the school is its long term retention of a core group of teachers.

The faculty has been further strengthened by careful hiring and training and by a supportive community of experienced and inexperienced teachers.

Alternative schools can be very isolated. Connections with the district as a whole and other optional schools in the system have helped ease some of Moore's Creek's isolation. With a large number of faculty members moving on to principalships and district level positions, the school has been able to have a supportive relationship with district leaders. Since its second year, the school has been part of a system of open schools and programs that extends from kindergarten to twelfth grade. This has provided additional supportive relationships for the school and continuity for the families. Today, Moore's Creek is part of a system of magnet schools, increasing its visibility and validity.

Affective considerations have also had an impact on the success of Moore's Creek. Chief among these are the school's sense of history and the pragmatic persistence of many staff members. The school's sense of history has kept it connected to the values of the past, and pragmatic persistence has helped the staff adapt to present day realities while maintaining their commitment to these values.

The significance of public information has been discussed in literature on magnet schools in relationship to equity (Bomotti, 1996; Fennimore, 1996; Petronni, 1996) but not in terms of its overall value to alternative schools. Aggressively publicizing schools of choice increases the pool of suitable students, but perhaps in the light of contemporary emphasis on quantitative measures of success, public information can play an even more important role.

If success breeds success, then successful alternative schools have the opportunity to increase their acceptance and validity through self-promotion. This could potentially have the effect of off-setting some of the unbalanced influence of quantitative measures. Quantitative measures are accessible and easy to understand, but other indications of success are also persuasive. Professional recognition and the accomplishments of Moore's Creek graduates are measures of the school's success that are of at least equal value to its record on end-of-year and national achievement tests.

But publicizing the successes of innovative schools will not benefit those schools alone. Such publicity has the potential to once again challenge and galvanize the public's imagination, setting forth alternative models for educating our children. To a large extent, the alternatives movement in the late 1960's and early 1970's was

fueled by the popular press. Trade books about alternative schools and Joseph Featherstone's (1967, 1968) New Republic series brought national attention to innovative schools. Today, at least two generations of students have been educated in modern alternative schools, yet the schools have slipped into obscurity. Conventional schools remain the model for public education, while the successes of alternative models go largely unnoticed. Research and evaluation need to be more widely publicized in order to validate alternative schools and improve public awareness of the range of choices that are, or could be, available in American schools.

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